

Editorial

Environment Wins

Two Area Valleys Saved

AT A TIME when we hear more and more talk about modifying or dispensing with the hard-won environmental standards and attitudes of the 1970s, it is heartening to see two of our mountain valleys saved from needless and unwarranted exploitation.

Look north of Harrisburg and you see the imposing green barrier of Blue Mountain, a natural demarcation where the suburbs end and "the country" begins. It is just the first of many similarly long and generally flat-topped ridges beyond rising above stream-carved valleys below. The first two of these narrow valleys are but minutes away from the Capitol, but they are a world away in their quiet beauty and serenity. That they still retain most of their rustic charm and natural splendor while lying in such close proximity to an expanding metropolitan area is more the wonder than that man has eyed them for what they could be and not what they are. But they have survived largely unscarred, and the events of the past week suggest that they will continue to do so into the future. At the very least, the immediate threats to their character have been stopped.

In the case of Fishing Creek Valley, the state Environmental Hearing Board lived up to its name, finding that a proposal to locate a landfill there imposed an environmental price which "far outweighed any offsetting benefit." Significantly, the board found no need for the proposed landfill, a factor which the Department of Environmental Resources refused to consider when it ruled in favor of the dump in 1980. Thus, the ruling is not only good news for the residents of the valley and those who like to visit, but also to Harrisburg which faced the possible loss of trash — and revenue — for its incinerator if the landfill had been allowed.

The ruling may have established an important precedent if it forces DER to consider need in the evaluation of future projects. Need

is or should be an elementary consideration in weighing the merits of any project likely to have environmental consequences or impose itself on unwilling residents. Our resources — both monetary and environmental — are spread too thin to countenance undertakings which are redundant.

THE DECISION by Pennsylvania Power and Light Co. to abandon plans for a pumped storage power plant, which was made official this week, spares Stony Creek from a project which would have completely obliterated the wilderness quality of the upper reaches of the valley between Second and Third mountains. One of the outcomes of this conflict will be to increase state ownership of land in the valley and surrounding ridges and give it more protection than it has had since the white man first set foot in it.

Need, or the lack of it, may have played a role in this instance, as well. Certainly, the rate of growth in electrical consumption has changed dramatically since PP&L first envisioned the project. And while such facilities may have value as load-management tools, as PP&L suggests, especially during periods of peak demand, the fact that they consume more energy than they produce and the availability of other, less costly, means of achieving the same ends, makes the decision to drop the project one that is a plus for the environment, yet is of little or no consequence to the state's power supply.

The decisions by both the hearing board and PP&L are to be commended. They reflect a sensitivity to the concerns of citizens and the value of the environment that cannot be written into laws or regulations, but must come from a deeper and more thoughtful vision. And let us not forget those citizens, residents and outdoorsmen who fought the good fight and who have had, at long last, their views vindicated. It is a battle won, but, alas, there are sure to be others.